

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 170975
ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 EA-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00
SIG-03 SMI-01 COM-02 ACDA-12 AGRE-00 AID-05
CEA-01 CEQ-01 CG-00 CIAE-00 DLOS-09 DODE-00
DOTE-00 EB-08 EPA-01 SOE-02 DOE-15 FMC-01 TRSE-00
H-01 INR-10 INT-05 IO-13 JUSE-00 L-03 NSAE-00
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APPROVED BY S/PTA:AMB. POPPER
ARA/PAN-JHAAHR
OES-WMANSFIELD
L-TFORTUNE
ARA/PPC-SMITH
H-BFROWLEY

-----040271 070718Z /21

R 062328Z JUL 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:US, PN, MX, CS, CO, SENV, TOCY, EWWT
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PAGE 02 STATE 170975

SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON SEA LEVEL CANAL STUDY
COMMISSION

REF: STATE 156227

1. THE PANAMA CANAL SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE MERCHANT

MARINE AND FISHERIES COMMITTEE HELD HEARINGS JUNE 21, 27
AND 28 ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION ON A SEA-LEVEL CANAL STUDY
COMMISSION. REFTEL (NOTAL) DESCRIBED THE DRAFT BILLS.

2. THE JUNE 21 SESSION WAS DEVOTED TO SENATOR GRAVEL'S
DESCRIPTION OF HIS PROPOSAL AND A STRONG PLEA FOR EARLY
STUDY AND CONSTRUCTION OF A SEA LEVEL CANAL TO FACILITATE
SHIPMENT OF ALASKAN OIL TO THE GULF AND EAST COASTS OF THE
US. MERCHANT MARINE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MURPHY ANNOUNCED
HIS SUPPORT FOR A STUDY COMMISSION, WHILE SENATOR GRAVEL
CLAIMED IT HAD THE APPROVAL OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT.
QUESTIONERS WERE SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT GRAVEL PROPOSED
FINANCING THROUGH A PRIVATE CANAL COMPANY, ONE-THIRD OF
WHOSE BONDS WOULD BE GUARANTEED BY USG, WITH THE BALANCE
OF THE FUNDS COMING FROM JAPAN AND ARAB COUNTRIES.

3. ON JUNE 27 ADMINISTRATION WITNESSES LED OFF BY
AMBASSADOR POPPER INDICATED THE ADMINISTRATION FELT THE
GRAVEL PROPOSAL WAS PREMATURE AND THAT ANY STUDY PROPOSAL
SHOULD BE MODIFIED TO CONFORM TO THE JOINT STUDY PROVIDED
FOR IN ARTICLE XII OF THE CANAL TREATY. GENERAL DOLVIN
FOR DOD DISCUSSED DEFENSE AND ENGINEERING ASPECTS OF A
SEA LEVEL CANAL, WHILE THE PANAMA CANAL COMPANY STATEMENT
DISCUSSED FUTURE TRAFFIC AND REVENUE PROJECTIONS FOR THE
PRESENT CANAL AND A SEA LEVEL CANAL. IN RESPONSE TO STAFF
QUESTIONING, AMBASSADOR POPPER NOTED THAT SO FAR, AT
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PAGE 03 STATE 170975

LEAST, WE HAVE HAD NO EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST OR CONCERN
BY COUNTRIES OTHER THAN PANAMA IN CONSTRUCTION OF A SEA
LEVEL CANAL.

4. THE JUNE 28 SESSION HEARD FROM A MARINE ENGINEERS'
REPRESENTATIVE, THE FORMER STAFF DIRECTOR OF THE 1970 SEA
LEVEL CANAL STUDY, TRANSPORTATION ECONOMIST LEONARD
KUJAWA, AND OTHERS, ALL OF WHOM SUPPORTED THE NEED FOR A
STUDY. THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION AND REPRESENTATIVES OF
ALL BUT ONE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS TESTIFYING ALSO
FAVORED THE STUDY COMMISSION BECAUSE IT WOULD PERMIT A
START ON RESEARCH INTO THE ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED
WITH A SEA LEVEL CANAL.

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